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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 000807

SIPDIS

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TRANSPORTATION FOR SMCDERMOTT, KBHATIA, GRETCH
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TREASURY FOR GCHRISTOPULOS, LSTURM, AND AJEWEL
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2015

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: SAG OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON JANUARY OPEN SKIES TALKS

REF: A. LFAUX-GABLE EMAILS

[B. 04](#) PRETORIA 5259

[C. 04](#) PRETORIA 5072

Classified By: (U) Classified by MC Jeff Hartley for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY. Department of Transport Director for Aviation Regulation Godfrey Selepe described January Open Skies talks in Washington D.C. as "positive" and "encouraging." Selepe still plans to resume talks during a July visit to the United States. He supports an open dialogue throughout the process in order to develop a relationship between the South African and U.S. teams. He said that Minister of Transport Jeff Radebe is "almost convinced" that an Open Skies agreement with the United States is in South Africa's best interest, but argued that it should be a "full Open Skies" agreement without restrictions.
END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) Department of Transport Director for Aviation Regulation Godfrey Selepe met with Econoff February 15 to discuss Open Skies talks that were held January 27 in Washington D.C. Selepe described the talks as "positive." He said that while he remains open-minded about Open Skies, President Mbeki's policy is one of managed liberalization for South Africa. In this context, he said he was encouraged by comments from U.S. officials on potentially phasing in certain aspects of Open Skies. He said this portends greater flexibility in coming to an Open Skies agreement than was the case in 2001. At that time, Selepe said that U.S. negotiators were not allowed to deviate from the prescribed implementation of the U.S. model text on Open Skies.
(COMMENT: A phased approach of certain Open Skies aspects may help sell Selepe more fully on an Open Skies agreement with the United States. U.S. negotiators could represent and leverage potential transitions as an accommodation of Mbeki's managed liberalization policy. END COMMENT)

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Selepe said that a busy 2005 schedule prevents him from traveling to the United States sooner than July. At that time he will visit both the United States and Canada with officials from the Department of Environment and Tourism, SATourism, and interested airlines (Reftel C). Selepe agreed that it would be productive to maintain a dialogue with U.S. officials throughout the negotiation process. He said that due to his long-standing relationship with U.K. negotiators he is comfortable being frank whenever misunderstandings arise. He would like to develop a similar relationship with U.S. officials. Selepe does not describe himself as an "old-school negotiator," revealing his position or objectives little by little. Instead, he said he prefers to be open and transparent from the outset. Consequently, he sees no reason why an Open Skies agreement could not be negotiated and concluded in one day with prior agreement on core issues.

[¶4.](#) (C) Selepe said that Minister of Transport Jeff Radebe is "almost convinced" that an Open Skies agreement with the United States is in South Africa's best interest. Selepe said it was apparent that Radebe felt this way in the weeks leading up to his January visit to the United States. As a result, Selepe said that he is approaching Open Skies talks with the United States as though it is likely to become a reality. However, he argued that if South Africa is going to do Open Skies with the United States then it should be "full Open Skies," referring to restrictions imposed on full cabotage and via the Fly America Act.

FRAZER